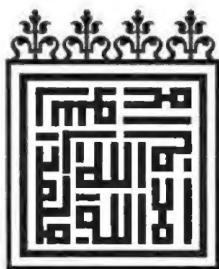


truth *in* advertising
or:
the selling of
Şūfism



by
Hājj °Abdullāh Noorudeen Durkee
Green Mountain School, North America

originally prepared for:
Fifth Annual International Association of Sufism Symposium
1998 ° California ° 1418

©

‘Abdullāh Noorudeen Durkee
Shādhūlī School
Green Mountain Branch
North America

بِسْمِ اللَّهِ الرَّحْمَنِ الرَّحِيمِ

Praise be to Allāh, Lord of all the worlds who, through His Eternal Word, does not cease to be praised: The Universally Merciful, The Singularly Compassionate, Who by His Mercy has stirred up within us gratitude for His Goodness wherewith He has enriched us and inspired us to praise and glorify Him.

The limits of favor and the bounds of praise were extended when He promised to those grateful for His bounty still more blessings; and He spread wide the carpet of His Assembly to those who remember Him. He has brought into subjection all things according to His Wisdom and Equity, as He has willed, by His Power, so that by His Authority the mover remains still and the still moves. *'He is the First and the Last, The Outer and the Inner,'* (57:3) the Controller of expansion (*baṣṭ*) and contraction (*qabḍ*), *'the Knower of the Unseen (al-ghayb); not even the weight of an atom, or less than that or greater than that, either in the heavens or on the earth escapes Him.'* (34:3)

We praise Him with the praise of those who know Him with true knowledge of Him. We give thanks to Him with the expressions of gratitude of those who acknowledge the perfection of His goodness and favor. We bear witness that there is no deity other than Allāh ﷻ alone, having no companion, with an affirmation to which no doubt is attached and before which no door closes from accepting.

We further testify that our liege-lord Muḥammad ﷺ is the Perfected (*ʿinsānu-l-kāmil*) Worshipper (*ʿabdu-l-llāh*), His Slave and the Final Prophet and Messenger of Mercy chosen from a family of honor and of the purest nobility, whose virtues speech falls short of describing. Allāh ﷻ bless him ﷺ with a blessing that will bring us to him ﷺ and gather us round him ﷺ on the Day of Assembly and Reckoning. May Allāh ﷻ be pleased with his family, his helpers, his descendants, the people of his household, his illustrious companions, the best of friends, as long as a star will shine, the full moon shall rise and a cloud shall float above the face of the earth.

In its beginnings Ṣūfism was a reality without a name.

In the present time it would appear that in many cases Ṣufism has become a name without a reality.

Using a computer, a modem and a search engine or crawler one can find more than fifty sites on the Web that purport to offer information or instruction, at one level or another, on the general subject of Ṣūfism.

Almost all of these sites offer books, tapes, videos and other forms of paraphernalia, including, in one case, tee shirts, that ostensibly will provide the reader, or the consumer, with information about what Ṣūfism is and what it can do for you.

By pointing one's browser at one or another of these sites, once past the slick graphics one is hit by many conflicting claims. Some groups claim to be the only true 'Ṣūfī' order; some to be the paramount order; yet others claim that their leader is the spiritual pole (*quṭb*) of the age. Then there are slightly more modest teachers who only claim to be *the* grand master of such-and-such an order whilst others, a bit more shy or sly, claim, or hint, that they are the sole purveyors of the secret teachings of a whole string of orders.

A trip to the local or regional specialty bookstore is not all that helpful either, for here, too, one is met by the same plethora of conflicting claims and counter claims.

And if one really wants to get confused as to who's who and what's what, one can attend the numerous workshops, conferences and summer camps, etc. where 'Ṣūfism' is even more directly and intensively merchandised by the many sharp entrepreneurs who are, if you like, in the business of 'Ṣūfism.'

One can even go on 'Ṣūfī' tours in which one is taken to a foreign and often exotic country like India or Pakistan or Egypt or Morocco and introduced to certain people said to be ṣūfīs and invited to take part in various purported ṣūfīc practices.

At one level it is better to hide the mistakes of others, but at another level, especially if these mistakes contribute to leading people astray, one must be forthright and even blunt. It is not my intention to harm others but rather to warn others in order

that we may be guided to “the straight path, the path of those upon whom You have bestowed favour, not of those who have (evoked) Your wrath nor of those who go astray. (1:6-7)¹”

It is no small matter to trust one’s self and soul to another. It is wise to remember that thousands of ships have gone down this whirlpool of which not even a plank appeared on the shore.

In an obvious example of mis-labeling, there are those who claim that such disparate people as Meher Baba, Gurdjieff and Rajneesh were teachers of Ṣūfism.

Let it suffice to say that only peripherally could these men be taken to be teachers of Ṣūfism as, for the most part, they or their followers used bits and peices of Ṣūfī teachings as a convenient hanger on which to drape their own cloth. In other cases their followers, like magpies, collected bits and pieces of shiny teachings and used them to feather their own nests or even to make, what is called in America, a quick buck.

Then there are those who, like grave robbers or temple looters, have lifted teachings out of their natural setting, which they think of or refer to as ‘the spiritual practices of Ṣūfism’, and by changing a few words here or there issued whole series of books in which authentic teachings appear as unconnected nuggets among endless fabricated dross that leaves the teachings high and dry, orphaned and widowed and cast entirely out of context.

Here, lest it be thought that I am a bit too rabid on the subject let me quote the scholar of Ṣūfism, R. W. J. Austin².

“This practice of attempting to cream off from the major religions material considered acceptable and palatable is ill-conceived, deceptive and dangerous, since it leads people to imagine that they are able, without the necessary doctrinal and psychological training, to acquire the spiritual blessing and benefit intended only for those whose committment is to the particular tradition as a whole.”

¹Qur’ān. Chapter (*sūrah*) numbering followed by Verse (*’āyat*) numbering.

²from the forward by R.W.J. Austin in *Sufism, The Mystical Doctrines and Methods* by William Stoddart, Sanuel Weiser, New York 1976

Whilst there can be no doubt as to the authenticity of the antecedents of a figure like Inayat Khan, it is not difficult to see that his teachings bear little resemblance to the source teachings of the earlier masters in the initiatic chain (*silsilah*) of his school or even the actual teachings of his own Ṣūfī teachers.

His innovations inspired others like Vilayat Khan, Sam Lewis and their students to collect teachings and practices from every imaginable source, adding a bit of this and that collected from here and there, and put them into a blender and whip up the Universal All Time Good Time Oriental Milk Shaykh on the order of Akbar's Dīn Illāhī — an earlier example of misguided innovation of which Sam Lewis thought highly.

Then there are certain scholars, who with great skill, translate seminal texts but never quite completely. If one doesn't know the language it is not clear how the work has been subtly filtered and shaped to advance one agenda or another.

Yet again there are others like Bly and Barks, and now even Chopra, who selectively translate verses of Mawlanā Jalālu-d-dīn Rūmī ؒ out of context so as to subtly advance their own agenda to the point that recently a further edited excerpt from an already excerpted verse of the Mawlanā appeared on a sex video along with his name in the form of his kunya: "Rumi". Do yet we wonder what shame (*ʿayb*) is or might be?

In a similar fashion to those who translate the verses of Mawlanā Jalālu-d-dīn Rūmī ؒ out of context are those who have removed the practice of whirling and *samāʿ* completely outside of the matrix in which it developed and then merchandised it both in the secularised east and the pseudo-spiritualised west as a free standing 'practice' devoid of its source and substance, its heart and soul which rests inside of ʾIslām.

And if Mawlanā Rūmī ؒ has become a growth industry for some, there are still others who make a living out of exploiting the teachings of Shaykh ibn al-ʿArabī ؒ, turning them into exquisite glitters of broken glass or dry as dust intellectual maunderings masquerading as a metaphysic in the guise of an intellectual aesthetic which is nigh totally divorced from the actual direct teaching of Shaykh al-Akbar ؒ.

At another level there are the oh-so-rigorous universalists who, whilst outwardly Muslim, privately propagate the doctrine of “the primordial tradition which, in reality, is the same everywhere, regardless of the different shapes it takes,”³ thus subtly abetting the sentimental universalists in their attempt to extract Ṣūfism out of ʿIslām by casting it as the primordial tradition.

From yet another perspective there are those who try to make or assert connections that don’t really exist. Here we have in mind Massignon’s magisterial, but ultimately mis-leading, study of the life of Ḥusayn ibn Mansūr al-Hallāj رحمته الله⁴ in which boundaries that actually do exist are blurred, for whilst it might appear that both Jesus and ʿĪsā عليه السلام are one and the same person,⁵ the reality is they weren’t, aren’t and never will be.

Then there are the orientalist who would have us believe that Ṣūfism, and indeed ʿIslām itself, emerged out of Christian spirituality, citing contacts of the Prophet صلى الله عليه وسلم with the monk Baḥīrā and Waraqaḥ, cousin of his beloved wife Kḥadija رضي الله عنها.

Still others suggest that Ṣūfism is too subtle to be the product of the Arab ‘mind’, which they see as sterile, unimaginative and certainly totally incapable of any form of metaphysic. Here I have in mind Orientalists like Nicholson, who contend that if Ṣūfism is anything it must be a byproduct of neo-Platonic philosophy, and others like Thölluck who find its beginnings in pre-Islamic Persian thought, which submerged and camouflaged itself and then cunningly hid itself in the inimical teachings of the Arab Muslim conquerors so that it might finally undo those teachings from within, as it were.

Yet others say that Ṣūfism is no more than a mix of Greco-Roman and Judeo-Christian tenets, whilst others insist that

³R.Guénon: *La Demiurge*”, La Gnose 1909

⁴*La Passion de Ḥusayn Ibn Mansūr al-Hallāj: martyr mystique de l’Islam exécuté à Bagdad le 26 mars 922; étude d’histoire religieuse*, Gallimard, Paris, 1975. Translated under the title *The Passion of al-Hallāj - Mystic and Martyr of Islam* trans. by H. Mason and published under the Bollingen Series XCVIII by Princeton University Press, 1982

⁵See my essay, *Some personal thoughts on Muslim-Christian Dialogue*. in *Muslim-Christian Dialogue*, edited by Dr. Seyed Ali Ausaf and Dr. Darrol Bryant, Paragon Press, St. Paul 1998

Şūfism came about as a result of an infusion of Hindu and Shamanic Buddhist ideas that infiltrated the Islamic milieu.

Beyond them are the confabulists; the ones who embroider the edges of the maps with dragons and chimæra, the Tweedies and the Yagins, whose sources are so bizarre and outlandish as to be ludicrous, but who have somehow managed to convince people that what they are peddling is some form of Şūfism.

Nor should we forget in this enumeration the globe trotting super-stars flying here and there busily servicing their various groups on one continent or another all the while being photographed with some V.I.P. or ruler. One wonders how they have time to even know who their students might or might not be let alone teach and train (*tarbiyah*) them in anything other than the broadest generalities of the Şūfī way.

Then there are teachers (*sic*) who try to make the ḥalāl ḥaram and even worse the ḥaram ḥalāl thus giving rise to whispered stories of unlawful sexual relationships between teacher and student and, more typically, between men and women who call themselves wayfarers on the Şūfī path.

Such stories of illicit sexuality swirl from both east and west just as the stories of reputed şhuyūkh who secretly take money, goods or even political favours from their murīds.

Proof of course is always hard to come by. In the case of illicit sexual happenings it takes witnesses and in lieu of witnesses it takes rather heavy oaths. Theft and usurpation of the goods of the muridūn by coercion or seduction is also hard to prove. Yet such stories circulate and every year there seem to be new ones or further twists on old ones, which arouse mis-trust and doubt in the minds and hearts of seekers.

Faced with all these claims and counter-claims; with the flim-flammers, fast talkers, mouth dancers, slicksters, tricksters, assorted con-men and wolves dressed in sheepskins posing as şhuyūkh, murshidūn and pīrān, are there any criteria an aspirant might be able to apply to the various declarations and pronouncements that are everywhere being made that what is being purveyed is somehow 'Şūfism', which would allow seekers to discern the real goods from the counterfeit?

A simple rule of thumb is that if the person who claims to be a *shaykh* or *pīr* or *murshid* does not teach you about, and point you directly to, the teachings of Allāh ﷻ contained in the Qurʾān and manifest in the way of life (*sunnah*) of the final prophet, Muḥammad ﷺ, there is no way that he or she can be considered to be other than a pretender to Ṣūfism.

My brother and colleague, Shaykh Aḥmad ʿAbdu-r-Rashīd of the Naqshbandi-Mujaddidi ṭarīqah, in a letter addressed to the organisers of this symposium wrote in a related vein,

“We must remember that Sufism is an expression of ʾIslām. For anyone to minimize or avoid this fact cuts at the very core and root of deen. Perhaps even more relevant for post-modern individuals, to minimize the connection between Ṣūfism and ʾIslām is to deprive people of the opportunity to find, to apply, and even to evolve standards from the treasure house of guidance provided for us in the Holy Qurʾān and the Ḥadīth of the Prophet Muḥammed (*salla-Allāhu ʿalayhi wa sallam*).”

In another class are those who my old friend Sīdī Maʿaddāwī az-Zirr ؒ succinctly described as follows: “There are those who love the ṣūfis and there are those who are ṣūfis.”

The lovers of Ṣūfism, unlike the deceivers and pretenders, may have the right idea and even the right attitude but unfortunately they assume, because they love Ṣūfism, that not only are they ṣūfis but that they can impart the science (*ʿilm*) of Ṣūfism to others without having gone through the discipline of submitting themselves to a teaching *shaykh*. They further confuse the matter by setting themselves up as teachers without having received explicit permission (*ʾidhn*) to initiate and teach others.

The pretenders are dangerous in that they directly lead people astray and the lovers are dangerous in that they can indirectly lead others astray, and because, at the very least, they waste the precious time of aspirants because they have nothing really to teach but sentimentality and minor delusions.

With that in mind, and hopefully without having left too bad a taste in any one’s mouth, let us continue on and see if we can make clear at least a few aspects of what we may refer to as:

The Real Goods

All Ṣūfī ways (ṭurūq) trace back to a single human being who is none other than Prophet Muḥammad ibn ʿAbdullāh ﷺ, the Mercy to all the worlds from the Lord of all the worlds ﷻ.

They may trace back through Abū Bakr ؓ or thru ʿAlī ؓ, but in the end this is beside the point, as Sayyidinā Muḥammad ﷺ is *their* ṣhaykh and ʿimām and it is he who is ultimately the Ṣhaykh of all the ṣhuyūkh, the Murshid of all the murshidūn, the Pir of all the pirs. and the ʿImām of all the aʿimmah.

A single ṭariqah traces its lineage back to Uways al-Qarānī ؓ and stops there. We would only need remind the followers of this way, and surely they would agree, that we only know of Uways al-Qarānī ؓ because Rasūlullāh ﷺ mentioned him, Had he not mentioned him he would have been as singularly (*fard*) unknown and transparent as he was in his own time.

At the head of all the Ṣūfī initiatic chains (*salāsil*) stands the Prophet Muḥammad ﷺ. It is he and no other who is both our guarantor and the guarantor of all the ṭurūq. It is he through whom all bayʿah is given and it is his hand that is above the hands of the ṣhuyūkh, for none has any authority other than from him, and his authority (*ṣulṭān*) is from Allāh ﷻ alone.

﴿ إِنِّ الذِّينَ يُبَايِعُونَكَ إِنَّمَا يُبَايِعُونَ اللَّهَ يَدُ اللَّهِ فَوْقَ أَيْدِيهِمْ ﴾

°INNA-L-LADḥĪNA YUBĀYIʿŪNAKA

°INNAMĀ YUBĀYIʿŪNA LLĀH ; YADU-LLĀHI FŌWQAʾAYDĪHIM :

*Truly those who swear allegiance to you swear allegiance to Allāh;
the hand of Allāh is over their hands.
(al-Fath 48:10)*

﴿ إِنَّا اللَّهُ وَ مَلَكُوتُهُ يُصَلِّنْ عَلَى النَّبِيِّ
يَا أَيُّهَا الَّذِينَ ءَامَنُوا صَلُّوا عَلَيْهِ وَسَلِّمُوا تَسْلِيمًا ﴾

°INNA-LLĀHA WAMALĀʾĪKATAHŪ YUṢALLUNA ʿALA-N-NABĪY
YĀĀʾAYUHA-LLADḥĪNA ʾĀMANŪ
SALLŪ ʿALAYHI WA SALLIMŪ TASLIMĀ

*Truly Allāh and His Angels send blessings upon the Prophet.
Oh you who believe ask blessings upon him and send him abundant peace.
(al-Aḥzāb 33:56)*

About the identity of the Messenger ﷺ referred to there can be no doubt, for it is Allāh ﷻ who proclaims,

﴿ مُحَمَّدٌ رَسُولُ اللَّهِ
وَالَّذِينَ مَعَهُ أَشِدَّاءُ عَلَى الْكُفَّارِ رُحَمَاءُ بَيْنَهُمْ
تَرَاهُمْ رُكْعًا سُجَّدًا يَبْتَغُونَ فَضْلًا مِّنَ اللَّهِ وَرِضْوَانًا
سِيمَاهُمْ فِي وُجُوهِهِمْ مِّنْ أَثَرِ السُّجُودِ
ذَٰلِكَ مَثَلُهُمْ فِي التَّوْرَةِ ۚ وَمَثَلُهُمْ فِي الْإِنْجِيلِ كَزَرْعٍ
أَخْرَجَ شَطْئَهُ فَتَازَرَهُ فَاسْتَغْلَظَ فَاسْتَوَىٰ عَلَىٰ سُوقِهِ
يُعِجِبُ الزُّرَّاعَ لِيَغِيظَ بِهِمُ الْكُفَّارَ
وَإِنَّ اللَّهَ لَآلِذِينَ ءَامَنُوا وَعَمِلُوا الصَّالِحَاتِ مِنْهُمْ
مَغْفِرَةً وَأَجْرًا عَظِيمًا ۝

MUHAMMADUR-RASŪLU-LLĀH ۝

WA-L-LADHĪNA MA‘AHŪ ‘ASHĪDDĀ’U ‘ALA-L-KUFFĀRI
RUHAMĀĀ’U BAYNAHUM TARĀHUM RUKK‘AN SUJJADAŅY-
YABĀTAGHŪNA FADLAM-MINA-LLĀHI WA RIDWĀNĀŅ SĪMMĀHUM
FĪ WUJŪHIHIM-MIN ‘ATHĀRI-S-SUJŪDĀ ۝ DHĀLIKA MATHĀLUHUM FI-
T-TAWRĀTI WA MATHĀLUHUM FI-L-‘INJĪL ۝ KAZAR‘IYN ‘AKĤRAJA
SHĀT‘ĀHŪ FA‘AZARĀHU ‘FĀSTAGĤLAḌĤA FĀSTAWĀ ‘ALĀ SŪQIHĪ
YU‘JIBU-Z-ZURRĀ‘A LI-YAGĤĪḌĤA BIHIMU-L-KUFFĀR ۝ WA ‘ADA-
LLĀHU-L-LADHĪNA ‘ĀMANŪ WA ‘AMILŪ-Ş-ŞĀLIĤĀTI MINHUM
MAGĤFIRATAŅW-WA‘AJĀRAN ‘AḌĤĪMĀ ۝

Muhammad is the Messenger of Allāh.

Those with him are hard on the unbelievers [and] mercy full amongst themselves.

You see them bowing and prostrating —

seeking bounty from Allāh and His Acceptance. ۝

Their mark is on their faces — the trace of prostration. ۝

That is their likeness in the Torah and their likeness in the Gospel: ۝

(The believers) are as a seed that puts forth its shoot and strengthens

— it grows full and rises straight upon its stalk,

pleasing the sowers, that through them He may enrage the disbelievers. ۝

*Allah has promised those of them who believe and do deeds of righteousness,
forgiveness and an immense reward. ۝*

{al-Faḥ 48:29}

This, then, is the source we are talking about and it is from this point and only this point that we can describe what we mean by the real goods.

Whoever thinks otherwise or imagines that consequentially it could be other wise is talking about something else other than what Šūfism is, both in essence and manifestation.

The propositons of the equation in ascending order are:

- All šūfis profess to be member of one way (*ṭariqah*) or another.
- All of these ways (*ṭurūq*) trace back to and are ultimately legitimized by Muḥammad ﷺ.
- Muḥammad ﷺ is the Messenger of Allāh ﷻ.
- The Message of Allāh ﷻ is the Qurʾān, which is the Revelation granted to Muḥammad ﷺ by Allāh ﷻ.

Therefore if you want to understand what Šūfism is and what it is not, you must ultimately look to the Qurʾān and the Prophet ﷺ if you wish to find answers.

Furthermore it is safe to say that if a teacher, even if he or she can fly in the air or read your mind, does not base his or her teachings solidly on the Qurʾān and the teachings (ʿaḥādith) of the Prophet ﷺ, or does not refer the aspirant to the Qurʾān and the teachings of the Prophet ﷺ as the ultimate source of all the teachings, then what is being taught is not Šūfism but something else.

Regarding what ever that “something else” may or may not be is ultimately not our concern. It may have good in it or may have evil in it but whether it is, good or evil, it is not Šūfism but “something else” about which we can only say, *Allāhu ʿālim* , which simply means “Allāh knows best.”

Let us take, for example, those teachings of Sam Lewis which he himself wisely referred to as ‘Dances of Universal Peace’, but which are commonly called ‘Sufi Dancing’.

Could it be that these dances have anything to do with Šūfism as such, or are they ‘something else’?

If we were able to view these ‘dances’ as they were given at their beginning by Sam Lewis himself we might find Sam in the center of a circle of men and women leading them in invoking some of the Beautiful Names of Allāh ﷻ (al-ʾasmaʾu-llāhu-l-ḥusnā) such as Yā Ḥayy, Yā Ḥaqq.⁶

Does such a ‘dance’ have anything to do with Ṣūfism? Can it be considered to be Ṣūfī teaching?

If we look to the Qurʾān as the primary source of Ṣūfī teachings we find the following ʾāyat

﴿وَلِلَّهِ الْأَسْمَاءُ الْحُسْنَىٰ فَادْعُوهُ بِهَا﴾

WA LI-LLĀHI-L-ʾASMĀʾU-L-ḤUSNĀ FĀ-DʿŪHU BI-HĀ

And to Allāh belong the beautiful names so call Him by them
(al-ʾĀʿrāf 7:180)

Now clearly the people are invoking two of the Names of Allāh ﷻ which appear over and over again in the Qurʾān. Next if we look to the ʾāḥādīth we find these two Names are recorded by the muḥādīth, al-Tirmidhī ﷺ among the Names which the Prophet ﷺ spoke about as falling into the category of the Beautiful Names of Allāh (al-ʾasmaʾu-llāhu-l-ḥusnā).

So far so good.

However, if we look to how they are performed, which is in a mixed circle of men and women, we will never find any such teaching coming from the Prophet ﷺ. If we then try to find any instance of such ‘dancing’ in the Ḥishtiyyah silsilah which Sam claimed we will not find any instance of such a teaching from either Muʿinu-d-dīn Ḥishtī ﷺ or his teacher ʾUṭhmān Harvanī ﷺ, nor will we find such teachings from Nizamu-d-dīn Awliyāʾ ﷺ or Naṣīru-d-dīn Chirāgh-i-Dilhī ﷺ or from ʿAlāʾu-d-dīn aṣ-Ṣabir ﷺ, who are major teachers in the Ḥishti line. In fact we will not find any such teaching even if we look to the teaching of his own Ṣūfī masters.

⁶Equally the circle could be invoking names of various Hindu deities such as in the Ram Nam dances or reflexes of the Buddha as in the Namo Amida Butsu (*sic*) dances. These obviously have nothing to do with Ṣūfism at any level or by any stretch of the imagination.

Here is what one of the men who Sam Lewis claimed as one of his teachers, the respected Ṣhaykh Abu Anīs Mūhammad Barkat ʿAlī ﷺ, the student of Ṣhaykh ʿUthmān Harūnī ﷺ, had to say on the subject of ‘ṣūfī dances’.

“A group of people who call themselves ‘Ṣūfī’ have been teaching that the purification of soul and the way of salvation lie through the media of Music and Sufi Dances. In their view, which they continue to call ‘Ṣūfī’, communion with God is attained not through compliance with the principles of Ṣharīʿah but by following strange and corrupt innovations of their own. All such people...cannot be termed ṣūfis by any definition. They multiply their sins by continually asserting their claim ...and are bound thereby to invite the wrath of Allāh.”⁷

From this we can see that there is both a criteria (*furqān*) and a method which we can apply to any teaching whereby we will be able to discern if it is or is not truly a Ṣūfī teaching or is just something made up or innovated (*bidʿah*).

Using the same criteria and method, let us apply it to a circle (*ḥalaqah*) of people gathered together for the sole purpose of remembering Allāh ﷻ (*dhikru-llāh*).

If we see that it is, as in the case of so-called Ṣūfī Dancing, a mixed circle of men and women, we know right off that this is contrary to the source teachings in accord with the principles outlined in ʿāyāt 31 of Sūratu-n-Nūr Q24).

However, we do know that at the time of the Prophet ﷺ women freely took part in religious services and congregated even at night in the masjid.⁸ We know this from the ḥadīth (Bukḥārī 9:22) which relates that once the Prophet ﷺ was so late in coming for the night prayer that on his arrival ʿUmār ʿUṣayyid called out, “The women and the children are falling asleep.”

⁷Finality of the Divine Revelations and Prophethood on Muhammad ﷺ by Barkat Ali published by Dar-ul-Ehsan Publications, Faisalbad, Pakistan 1979

⁸Masjid literally means a place of prostration. In English it is usually written as *mosque* which is derived from the French “*mosque*” which was derived from the Egyptian pronunciation of masjid in which the letter ‘j’ is pronounced in the Egyptian fashion as a hard ‘g’ as in *masgid*.

But whilst women were present in the masjid we also know that the women did not sit with the men but sat separately in the company of other women (Bukhārī 13: 15-20).

We also know that women performed dhikr out loud in the masjid as late as the time of °Umar ibn °Abdu-l-°Azīz (Bukhārī 13:12) so we can make a case for women performing dhikr in the masjid out loud but not sitting together with the men.

Using these criteria we can see that the practice of men and women performing dhikr in the same place and at the same time is acceptable and in accord with the sunnah.

Again, using the same criteria, we can easily come to know that dhikr is a practice legitimized by Allāh ﷻ in the Qur°ān in accord with many °āyāt⁹.

﴿ فَادْكُرُونِيْ اَذْكُرْكُمْ ﴾

FADḥKRŪNĪ °ADḥKURKUM

Remember Me and I will remember you
(al-Baqarah 72:152)

﴿ الَّذِيْنَ اٰمَنُوْا وَ تَطْمَئِنُّ قُلُوْبُهُمْ بِذِكْرِ اَللّٰهِ
اَلَا بِذِكْرِ اَللّٰهِ تَطْمَئِنُّ قُلُوْبُ ﴾

ALLADḥĪNA °ĀMANŪ WA TATĀMA°INNU-L-QULŪBUHUM BI-
DḥIKRI-LLĀH ; °ALA BI-DḥIKRI-LLĀHI TATĀMA°INNU-L-QULŪB

*Those who believe and pacify their hearts by the remembrance of Allāh;
Surely the remembrance of Allāh brings peace to the heart.*
(ar-Ra°ad 13:28)

﴿ وَ لَذِكْرِ اَللّٰهِ اَكْبَرُ ﴾

...WA LA-DḥIKRU-LLĀHI °AKBAR

...and the Remembrance of Allāh is greater...
(al-°Ankabūt 29:45)

⁹Usually translated as verses. However since the Qur°ān is not poetry it does not make sense to translate this word as ‘verse’ or ‘verses’. The literal meaning is ‘sign’ as in an indicator, or a token or a model or a paragon etc. It also carries the meaning of a miracle, for each °āyat is in itself a miracle.

Not only do we find many ʿāyāt relating to the the *dhikr*¹⁰, we also find many ʾaḥādīth relating to the *dhikr* such as,

Abu Saʿīd reported Rasūlullāh ﷺ as saying: “People will not sit remembering Allah (*dhikru-llāh*) without the angels surrounding them, mercy covering over them, and blessed tranquillity (*sakīnah*) descending on them, and Allah mentioning them among those who are with Him.”

Abu Dardāؓ reported that the Holy Prophet ﷺ said that on the Day of Reckoning there will be some people whose faces will be brightened with effulgence. They will be raised up on seats of pearls and others will envy them. But they will not be amongst the Prophets ﷺ or the Martyrs ؓ. He was asked for further details so that they might be recognised. The Holy Prophet ﷺ told those gathered that, “These will be people who belonged to different families and different places but assembled in one place for the remembrance (*dhikr*) of Allāh.”

In another ḥadīth it is mentioned that these people will have their dwelling place studded with gems on the upper-most storeys of Paradise. Each of these dwellings will have doors open to all sides and will be shining like a bright star.

In yet still another ḥadīth it is mentioned that the house in which Allāh ﷻ is remembered shines for the dwellers in the Garden in the same way as stars shine in the skies for the dwellers on Earth.

Abu Razin ؓ reports that the Prophet ﷺ said that the assemblies of remembrance of Allāh are the source of relief in this world (*ad-dunyā*) and the final world (*al-ʾākhirah*).

Anās ؓ reported that the Prophet ﷺ said, “When you pass by the gardens of Paradise fatten yourself by eating until you are replete.” The companions ؓ asked, “Oh Prophet ﷺ where are these gardens of Paradise?” He ؓ replied, “They are the circles of remembrance (*ḥilaqu-dh-dhikur*).”

Abu Saʿīd ؓ even reported that the Prophet ﷺ said, “Remember Allāh so much that people call you crazy (*majnūn*).”

¹⁰Pronounced as *zikr* on the subcontinent

Let us suppose that we came into the masjid and we found the people standing doing *dhikr*. We must ask, is this acceptable or is it a “strange and corrupt innovation” (*bid‘ah*)?

Applying the method we have outlined we look first to the Qur‘ān and here we find the following ‘āyat,

﴿الَّذِينَ يَذْكُرُونَ اللَّهَ قِيَمًا وَقُعُودًا وَعَلَىٰ جُنُوبِهِمْ﴾

AI-LADḥĪNA YADḥKURŪNA-LLĀHA
QIYĀMAÑW-WA QU‘ŪDAÑW-WA ‘ALĀ JUNŪBIHIM

Those who remember Allāh standing, sitting and on their sides
(‘Āl-i-‘Imrān 3:191)

Thus we can see that the practice of doing *dhikr* standing is possible. If we then look to an explanation of the Qur‘ān (*tafsīr*) we find that the exegetes usually hold that what is meant is that we should remember Allāh ﷻ in all situations. However, using the principle that everything not expressly prohibited is permitted, such a practice could be permissible.

- Now let us suppose that we found people doing the *dhikr* and at the same time they were swaying back and forth.

Nothing relating to this can be found in either the Qur‘ān or the Sunnah. However if we look to the jurists (*fuqaha*) we note that Nawawi has said that it is not prohibited and Shīrbīnī has said that it is not unlawful because it is only motions made while standing or bowing unless it is languid like the movements of the effeminate in which case it is reprehensible.

Of course more rigid observers find in it nothing but innovation (*bid‘ah*) of which the Prophet ﷺ said, “Beware of matters newly begun, for every matter newly begun is innovation, every innovation is mis-guidance and every misguidance is in hell.”¹¹

Here we must try to understand more clearly what is and what is not meant by innovation.¹²

¹¹Abū Dāwūd and Tirmidhī — Ḥadīth Ḥasana wa Ṣaḥīḥ

¹²What follows on *bid‘ah* is compiled from Aḥamd ibn Naqīb al-Misrī’s *The Reliance of the Traveller* as translated by Shaykh Noah Ha Mim Keller, al Hassan Publishing House, Amman, Jordan 1991 (see section w29.0-4)

We know from the collections of ṣaḥīḥ ḥadīth that some of the companions ﷺ initiated new actions, forms of invocation (*dhikr*), supplications (*duʿāʾ*) and so on that the Prophet ﷺ had never previously done or ordered to be done.

For instance both Bukhārī and Muslim report that the Prophet ﷺ said, “Bilal, tell me which of your acts in ʾIslām you are most hopeful about, for I have heard the footfall of your sandals in the garden.” Bilal ﷺ replied, “I have done nothing I am more hopeful about than the fact that I do not perform ablution at any time of the night or day without praying with that ablution whatever has been destined for me to pray.” ʿAsqalanī says in *Fathu-l-Barī*, “This shows that it is permissible to use personal reasoning (ʾ*ijtihād*) in choosing times for acts of worship. Bilal ﷺ reached these conclusions by his own inference and the Prophet ﷺ confirmed him therein.” The same use of ʾ*ijtihād* is true in the case of the martyr Khubayb ﷺ, who was the first to establish the sunnah of the two rakʿah (*rakaʿtayn*) for those who are steadfast in going to their death, as is reported in the Ṣaḥīḥ of Bukhārī.

This shows that it is possible to use personal reasoning in choosing the times of voluntary worship (*nafl*), without any previous command or precedent from the Prophet ﷺ other than the general commandment to perform the ṣalāh.

In another incident both Bukhārī and Muslim relate that Rifaʿa ibn Rafiʿ said, “When we were praying behind the Prophet ﷺ and he raised his head from bowing and said, ‘Allāh hears whoever praises Him,’ a man said, ‘Our Lord, Yours is the praise, abundantly, purely, blessedly.’ When he rose to leave, the Prophet ﷺ asked who said it, and when the man replied that it was he, the Prophet ﷺ said, “I saw some thirty angels each striving to be the one who wrote (it down).”

ʿAsqalanī says in *Fathu-l-Bari*, that this, “indicates the permissibility of initiating new expressions of *dhikr* in the ṣalāh other than the one related through ḥadīth texts as long as they do not contradict those conveyed by the ḥadīth.”

Bukhārī also related from Abu Saʿid al Khudrī that one man heard another reciting al-ʾIkhlāṣ (112) over and over again.

When morning came he went to the Prophet ﷺ and sarcastically mentioned it to him.

The Prophet ﷺ said, “By Him in whose hand is my soul, it equals one third of the Qurʾān.” Dāraqutnī recorded another version of this ḥadīth in which the man said, “I have a neighbor who prays at night and does not recite anything but al-ʾIkhlāṣ.”

Bukhārī also related from ʿĀʾisha رضي الله عنها that, “The Prophet ﷺ dispatched a man at the head of a military expedition who recited the Qurʾān for his companions at prayer, finishing each recital with al-ʾIkhlāṣ. When they returned, they mentioned this to the Prophet ﷺ, who told them, ‘Ask him why he does this,’ and when they asked him the man replied, ‘Because it describes the All-Merciful and I love to recite it.’ The Prophet ﷺ said to them, ‘Tell him that Allāh loves him.’”

Please note here that all these ʾaḥādīth refer to the prayer (*ṣalāh*), which is the most crucial and important of the acts of worship (*ʿibādah*) of which the Prophet ﷺ said, “Pray as you have seen me pray.”

That he ﷺ accepted the above examples of personal reasoning (*ʾijtihād*) shows that there is latitude in everything as long as it is within the general category of what is called for by Sacred Law (*ṣharīʿah*). Islamic scholars infer from it that every act for which there is evidence in *ṣharīʿah* and which does not oppose an unequivocal primary text or entail harmful consequences is not included in the category of reprehensible innovation (*bidʿah*), but rather is of the *sunnah*¹³, even if there should exist something whose performance is superior to it.

The jurist ʿIzz ibn ʿAbdu-s-Salām in his *al-Qawāʿid al-Kubrā* stated that innovations fall under five headings: obligatory (*wājib*), unlawful (*ḥarām*), recommended (*mandūb*), offensive (*makrūh*) and permissssible (*mubāḥ*).

¹³The reference here is not to *Sunan* as in *Kitāb wa Sunnah* but *sunnah* in its meaning of way, as in the ḥadīth, “He who inaugurates a good *sunnah* in ʾIslām earns the reward of it and of all who perform it after him without diminishing their own rewards in the least And he who introduces a bad *sunnah* is guilty of the sin of it and of all who perform it after him without diminishing their own sins in the least” reported in the *Ṣaḥīḥ* of Muslim

“Obligatory innovations include such things as the recording of the Qurʾān and the Shariʿah in writing lest they be lost; the study of Arabic and its grammar, declension and lexicography in order to learn the Qurʾān, the classification of ḥadīth in order to be able to discriminate between what is authentic and what is not.

“Unlawful innovations include such things as giving positions of authority in the realm of explication of shariʿah to those incapable or unsuitable; devoting one’s time to learning the beliefs of heretical sects that contravene the tenets of faith or the imposition of non-Islamic taxes or levies.

“Recommended innovations include such things as the building of schools for the teaching of the shariʿah, writing books on beneficial subjects, extensive research into fundamentals and application of shariʿah, in-depth studies of Arabic linguistics, the reciting of ʾawrād by those with a Sūfī path¹⁴ and commemorating the birth of the Prophet ﷺ.

“Offensive innovations include such things as embellishing the masājid, decorating the Qurʾān, having someone loudly repeat the *Allāhu ʾAkbars* of the ʾimām when his voice is audible.

“Permissible innovations include such things as sifting flour, using spoons or partaking of enjoyable food, drink or housing.”

The Moroccan muḥadith ʿAbdullāh Muḥammad al-Gḥimārī رحمه الله comments on what ʿIzz ibn ʿAbdu-s-Salām said,

“Because his classification of innovation was established on a firm basis in Islamic jurisprudence and legal principles, it was confirmed by Imām Nawawī, Ibn Hajar, ʿAsqalnī and the vast majority of Islamic scholars, who received his words with acceptance and view it obligatory to apply them to new events and contingencies that occur with the changing times and the people who live in them. One may *not* support the denial of his classification by clinging to the ḥadīth, ‘Every innovation is

¹⁴Here we note the commentary, which is very crucial to the point at hand, of Shaykh ʿAbdu-l-Wakīl Durubī رحمه الله who at this point specifically said, “or circles of dhikr in which the movement of the participants increases their remembrance of Allāh.”

mis-guidance,’ because the only form of innovation that is without exception misguidance is that concerning the tenets of faith, like the innovations of those whose teaching directly contradicted the beliefs of the early Muslims. This is the innovation of misguidance because it is harmful and devoid of any benefit.”

From all of this we can clearly see a process by which we can look at any particular practice and, by applying some or all of the various criteria we have mentioned, come to a conclusion about the validity or lack of validity of the practice in question.

Look for example at the claim of those who profess to transmit Ṣūfism without reference to the teachings of ʾIslām as they are understood. I have here in mind those who teach the Mavlawī turning without teaching the prayer¹⁵ (*ṣalāh*) or, similarly, those who teach the *dhikr* without teaching the *ṣalāh*.

Or look to the ‘Sufi-pretenders’ who say: “Prayers (*ṣalāh*) do not have much significance; rather, what is important is clearing one’s inner self (*nafs*).” They also say: “A person can be guided to Allāh through ʾIslām, Buddhism, fire-worship, or any another religion.” All of this belies the saying of Allah:

﴿ إِنِّ الدِّينَ عِنْدَ اللَّهِ الْإِسْلَامُ ﴾

ʾINNA-D-DĪNA ʾINDA-LLĀHI-L-ʾISLĀM

Truly the religion with Allāh is ʾIslām.

(ʾĀl-i-ʿImrān 3:19)

We know that often the pretenders, many of whom have some knowledge of ʾIslām or Arabic, say what is meant by this use of ʾIslām is best translated as ‘*Surrender*’ — no more, no less.

In fact they will even contend that they are far more assiduous in teaching their students how to really surrender, which in their understanding is a kind of ego-psychic catharsis followed by permissive non-differentiated transconsciousness, than the Muslims who, in their opinion, teach a kind of dead ritualism.

¹⁵The English word prayer is really a rather inadequate translation of the Arabic word *ṣalāh* which has many more dimensions than the understanding of prayer simply as supplication, invocation, plea, request etc.

This is both conceit and deceit on their part. It is what is called in Arabic, *jahl*, which means twisting things or making one thing seem like another when in fact it is not.

The Arabic language existed before the Prophet ﷺ came to renew ʾIslām, for he was not the first who taught ʾIslām since all the Prophets ﷺ in fact taught ʾIslām, and what are, in the present, called Hinduism, Zoroastrianism, Judaism, Christianity etc are vestigial and obsolete forms of ʾIslām.

Allāh ﷻ communicated to humanity the Last and Final Testament—Qurʾān al-Karīm—in Arabic just as, earlier, Allāh ﷻ communicated in Hebrew and Aramaic (which are also Semitic languages) to convey the Torah, the Psalms and the Evangel.

The word ʾislām existed prior to the coming of the Qurʾān just as other words like ṭahārah, shahādah, ṣalāh, ṣawm, ḥajj and jihād also existed as words that had certain known and understood meanings among the Arabs.

However when the Revelation began, and as it continued over a period of 23 years, the meanings of these words were gradually or, in some cases, all at once, changed by the Revelation itself as well as by the Practice (*sunnah*) of the Prophet ﷺ and the transactual practices (*muʿāmalāt*) of his companions ﷺ.

Thus, whilst it is true to say that ʾislām simply means surrender, the reality is that the religious, spiritual, metaphysical and legal meaning of this word was changed by the Revelation that came from Allāh ﷻ and was further clarified in the saying (*ḥadīth*) of the Prophet ﷺ who said, as reported by Muslim,

“ʾIslām is to testify (*shahadah*) that there is no deity save Allāh and Muḥammad is the Messenger of Allāh, and it is to perform the ṣalāh, to give the poor due (*zakāt*), and to fast (*ṣawm*) the month of Ramaḍān and it is to perform the pilgrimage (*ḥajj*) to the Ancient House if you can find a way.” So when we say,

﴿إِنِ الدِّينَ عِنْدَ اللَّهِ الْإِسْلَامُ﴾

ʾINNA-D-DĪNA ʾINDA-LLĀHI-L-ʾISLĀM

Truly the religion with Allāh is Surrender.

(ʾĀl-i-ʿImrān 3:19)

we are not simply referring to some generic form of surrender but rather to a very specific form of surrender which has been clearly defined both by Allāh ﷻ and the Prophet ﷺ.

At this point, we should more exactly understand these tenets of faith, for once we know what they are then we will be able, again using the principles that we have just written about, to apply them for the purpose of ascertaining the larger validity of the practices. Here I would like to reiterate that we are proceeding on the basis that Ṣūfism both in essence and manifestation is derived entirely from ʾIslām based on the postulates which I have mentioned earlier:

- All ṣūfīs profess to be members of one way (*ṭariqah*) or another.
- All of these ways (*ṭurūq*) trace back to and are ultimately legitimized by Muḥammad ﷺ.
- Muḥammad ﷺ is the Messenger of Allāh ﷻ.
- A Messenger is one who carries a Message.
- The Message of Allāh is the Qurʾān, which is the Revelation granted to Muḥammad ﷺ by Allāh ﷻ.
- It necessarily follows that if one is a ṣūfī, at the very least one must have a profound interest in both the contents of the Message and the way of the Messenger ﷺ.

With that understood again, I would then point out that the five bases or pillars (*arkan*) of ʾIslām mentioned in the definition are all *actions* easily performed by almost any human. This is in line with the recurring phrase in the Qurʾān which reads,

﴿الَّذِينَ آمَنُوا وَعَمِلُوا الصَّالِحَاتِ﴾

ALLADHĪNA ʾĀMANŪ WA ʿAMILU-Ṣ-ṢĀLIHĀT

Those who believe and act wholesomely.

(*al-Baqarah* 2:82)

Which brings us to the second part of the equation, which is that there is no belief without action, for belief without action is sophistry, and action not based on belief is ultimately futile.

The Ṣūfī is nothing if not a believer (*mu'min*) for why else would he or she do what they are doing unless they believed?

Again, as we have been doing, we must look to the word and see how the word has been defined by Allāh ﷻ and the Messenger ﷺ.

‘Belief’ in Arabic derives from the root *amana* meaning to be secure, to be sure, to be safe, to be sound in one’s being.

In the Ṣaḥīḥ of Muslim it is recorded that the Angel Jibril ﷺ said to the Prophet ﷺ, “Tell me about true faith (*ʿimān*),” and the Prophet ﷺ answered: “It is to believe in Allāh ﷻ, His Angels ﷺ, His Books, His Messengers ﷺ, the Last Day, and it is to believe in Destiny, its good and evil.”

« أَنْ تَوْمَنَ بِاللَّهِ وَ مَلَائِكَتِهِ وَ كُتُبِهِ وَ رُسُلِهِ
وَ الْيَوْمَ الْآخِرِ وَ تَوْمَنَ بِالْقَدَرِ خَيْرُهُ وَ شَرُّهُ »

Belief is to be sure of the existence of Allāh ﷻ who is simultaneously infinitely transcendent and entirely immanent,

﴿ لَيْسَ كَمِثْلِهِ شَيْءٌ ﴾

LAYSA KAMITHLIHĪ ShAY

*There is nothing like Him*¹⁶

(*ash-Shūrā* 42:11)

and

﴿ هُوَ مَعَكُمْ أَيْنَ مَا كُنْتُمْ ﴾

HUWA MA'KUM 'AYNA MĀ KUṬTUM

He is with you wherever you are.

(*al-Hadīd* 57:4)

‘Belief in Angels’ is to be sure that there are beings of light capable of assuming many different forms and who are each absolutely faithful to the order of Allāh ﷻ and are so ubiquitous that one cannot move one’s hand in any dimension or in any of the seven heavens without touching an angel.

¹⁶The use of the word “him” is not gender based as in *he* as opposed to *she*. The word does not, as such, refer to gender but is a means of discriminating the active manifestation from the latent potential.

Ten ﷺ are known including the archangels Jibrīl, Mikāʾīl, ʾIsrafīl, ʿAzrāʾīl; the angels of the grave Munkar and Nakir; and the angels who respectively guard the garden and the fire, Ridwān and Mālik; as well as the two Omnipresent Observers (*raqīban* ʿatīdā) who record our good and bad deeds.

‘Belief in the Books’ is to be sure of the Truth (*al-ḥaqq*) contained in the original revelations of the Tawrah revealed to Mūsā ﷺ, the Zabūr or Psalms revealed to Dāwud ﷺ, the ʾInjīl or Evangel revealed to ʿIsā ﷺ and the Qurʾān revealed to Muḥammad ﷺ.

‘Belief in the Books’, only one of which remains in its original form, is to be sure that what is contained within them is the Word of Allāh ﷻ which is the Truth (*al-ḥaqq*).

‘Belief in the Messengers of Allāh’ ﷻ is to be sure that Allāh ﷻ chose certain human beings to be His Messengers ﷺ. In the traditions it is mentioned that there are some 124,000 of these messengers. In the Qurʾān Allāh ﷻ makes clear that there is no people save that a messenger has been sent to them, “There is not a people but a warner has (lived and) passed away in its midst.” (35:24) and “For every nation there is a messenger.” (10:47). Some of these messengers ﷺ are unknown and some of them are known “And We sent messengers that We have mentioned to you before and messengers that We have not mentioned to you.” (4:164)

The known ones are Ādam, Idrīs, Nūḥ, Hūd, Ṣāliḥ, Lūṭ, Ibrāhīm, Ismāʿīl, Ishāq, Yaʿqūb, Yūsuf, Shuʿayb, Hārūn, Mūsā, Dāwūd, Sulaymān, Ayyūb, Dhū-l-Kifl, Yūnus, Ilyās, al-Yasaʿ, Zakariyyah, Yaḥyā, ʿIsā and Muḥammad¹⁷, peace and blessings be upon them and “we do not discriminate between any one of them.” (2:136)

In addition to these twenty-five there are also Luqmān and Dhū-l-Qarnayn who may be prophets ﷺ, as well as the mys-

¹⁷Adam, Enoch, Noah, Hūd and Ṣāliḥ (two earlier messengers to the Arabs) Lot, Abraham, Ishmael, Isaac, Jacob, Joseph, Jethro, Aaron, Moses, David, Solomon, Job, Ezekiel, Jonah, Elias, Elisha, Zacharias, John, Jesus and Muḥammad, peace and blessing be upon them all.

terious contemporary of the Prophet Mūsā ؑ who is not referred to by name in the Qurʾān (18:60-83) but whose name, al-Khidr ؑ, is known to us from ṣāḥih ḥadīth in al-Bukhārī.

‘Belief in the Last Day’¹⁸ means to be sure that there will be a day in which all those who have lived and died will be resurrected and everyone who ever lived will be judged by Allāh ﷻ on the basis of what they did for good or evil in this world. It means to be sure that as a result of this absolutely fair judgement, some of those who lived will, as a result of their deeds, be placed in the Fire and others will, by the Mercy (*rahmah*) of Allāh ﷻ, be placed in the Garden.

‘To believe in destiny’ — its good and its evil — means to be sure that Allāh ﷻ has ordained both good and evil before creating creation and that all that has been, is, and will be exists only through the decree (*qadāʾ*) of Allāh ﷻ.

The early Muslims explained this by saying, “It is knowing that what hits you was not going to miss you and what misses you was not going to hit you.”

I hope that I have not taxed my readers too heavily in reiterating a series of precepts which, for some, must be very well known and for others, perhaps, quite new and, even, complex.

I took this route in order to approach, step by step, the essential point from which all Ṣūfī teaching and practice emerges.

This point is the nexus where ʾIslām and ʾImān (action and belief) converge, and is termed ʾIḥsān, which might be loosely translated as putting the good into practice — right action.

The Prophet ﷺ said in response to the question of the Angel Jibrīl ؑ concerning the meaning of ʾIḥsān,

“It is to worship Allāh as though you see Him, and if you do not see Him, nevertheless He sees you.”

« أن تعبد الله كأنك تراه فإن لم تكن تراه فإنه يراك »

¹⁸Called the Last Day because after that Day there is no night.

As we said at the beginning of this essay, Ṣūfism in its beginnings¹⁹ was a reality without a name. What we now think of as Ṣūfism was not actually known as such, nor were Tafsīr, Fiqh, or Naḥw, until many years after the death of the Prophet ﷺ but the principle of ʾIḥsān existed from the very early days of the latest dispensation of ʾIslām and, indeed, is integral to ʾIslām, as it is the synthesis that arises when ʾIslām and ʾImān (acts of surrender and secure belief) are joined together.

To refresh our memory.

The Surrender (*al-ʾIslām*) consists of certain acts: precepts

- The Witnessing (*ash-Shahādah*)
- The Worshipping (*aṣ-Ṣalāh*)
- The Fasting (*as-Ṣawm*)
- The Purification of one's wealth through the prescribed giving of what is due to the poor and indigent (*az-Zakāt*)
- The Pilgrimage (*al-Ḥājj*)

The Faith (*al-ʾImān*) consists of a deep inner conviction that

- Allāh ﷻ exists
- Angels ﷼ exist
- Revelation exists
- Messengers ﷺ exist
- The Last Day exists
- Destiny — its good and evil — exists

The Perfection of Surrender and Faith, *al-ʾIḥsān* is

- To worship Allāh as though you see Him, and if you do not see Him, nevertheless He sees you.

It from this multi-dimensional congruence that Ṣūfism flows.

¹⁹ As we have tried to make clear, Ṣūfism is a dimension of ʾIslām and not a catchall or generic term for any and all kinds of esotericism or mysticism. In the same way that Ṣūfism exists at the very heart of ʾIslām, so too all of the previous dispensations have had and have their own mystical dimension. It is however a mistake to call the mystical dimension of another tradition “Ṣūfism”. One can say that the Kaballah is a mystical dimension of Judaism or that Tantra is an esoteric dimension of Hinduism or Zen is an esoteric dimension of Buddhism. Similarly one cannot say that Ṣūfism is the mystical tradition of any dispensation or tradition other than ʾIslām.

Allāh ﷻ mentions ʾIḥsān, in one form or another, more than seventy times in the Qurʾān.

﴿وَمَنْ أَحْسَنُ دِينًا مِّمَّنْ أَسْلَمَ وَجْهَهُ لِلَّهِ وَهُوَ مُحْسِنٌ﴾

WA MAN ʾAHSANU DĪNAM-MIMMAN ʾALAMA WAJHAHŪ
LI-LLĀHI WA HUWA MUḤSINU

And who is better in the Dīn²⁰ than the one who surrenders his essential self to Allāh and who puts the good into practice...

(al-Nisāʾ 4:125)

and

﴿إِنَّ رَحْمَتَ اللَّهِ قَرِيبٌ مِّنَ الْمُحْسِنِينَ﴾

ʾINNA RAḤMATA-LLĀHI QARĪBUM-MINA-L-MUḤSINĪN

Surely the Mercy of Allāh is near to those who put the good into practice.

(al-ʾAʿrāf 7:56)

In the first ʾāyat, the term ʾiḥsān appears in the form of *aḥsanu* and in both the first and second ʾāyat in the form of *muḥsinīn* meaning those one who are practicing right action (*al-ʾiḥsān*).

Here we must look again to the definition of ʾiḥsān and try to understand its two distinct dimensions.

In the first place “to worship Allāh as though you saw Him” means to perform all acts of worship (ʿibādah²¹) just as though

²⁰Dīn is another word that is very hard to translate adequately into English. It is most often translated as ‘religion’ but whereas religion is derived from the Latin *religio*, meaning to tie back in the sense that religion is what ties humanity back to God, the word, ‘ad-Dīn’ in Arabic is derived from *dana*, which means to be in debt. Thus ‘ad-Dīn’ refers to the debt that we owe to Allāh as the price of our life and the fulfillment of that debt though the various acts of worship (ʿibādāt) and mutual transaction (*muʿamalāt*) some of which we have already mentioned.

²¹ʿIbādah is derived from ʿabada, which means to serve, to worship, to adore and to venerate. It also means to enslave, enthrall, subjugate and subject. It is commonly seen in the word ʿAbdullāh, which means the servant or worshipful slave of Allāh. There are numerous Sūfī treatises written on the vast depths of the meaning of ʿibādah. At a certain point everything is ʿibādah, as in the well-known ḥadīth which says that to smile at someone is a form of ʿibādah, but more typically it refers to the performance of the various acts (such as shahadah, ṣalah, ṣawm, ḥajj etc) ordered by Allāh, and incumbent upon all adult, sane, free, and surrendered human beings.

you were in the Presence (*ḥadrah*) of Allāh ﷻ at every moment of worship which means, truthfully, in all of your life.

Needless to say, this implies a certain ‘attitude’ on the part of the worshipper, including humility and sincerity (*mukhlās*), as well as the sense of immersion in a kind of inward seeing or vision (*mukāshafah*) which can lead to the direct witnessing (*mushāhadah*) or contemplation of the Divine Presence.

“And if you do not see him, nevertheless He sees you,” means that, when engaged in the act of worship, one remains deeply conscious (*taqwā*) that in every action, one is being seen, heard, and answered by Allāh, both outwardly (*dhāhir*) and inwardly (*bāṭin*). This latter state is often called ‘muraqabah’ which refers to vigilant surveillance or observation of the self (*nafs*) — whether of the ‘abd by the rabb or of the rabb by the ‘abd²² is only a question for those unaware of the meaning of the ḥadīth, “Who knows his self (*nafs*) knows his Lord.”

The worshipper, in observing his Lord in Essence, ceases to be, but when he is he ‘sees’ his Lord by His *sifāt* or attributes (*al-‘asmā’u-l-ḥusna* or the beautiful names) and having ‘seen’ them manifests them in the sense that one who ‘sees’ even an atom of the infinite mercy (*ar-rahmah*) of Allāh is suffused by that mercy. And as that mercy suffuses one’s being that mercy is brought flows through the self (*nafs*) into the world (*dunyā*) and one becomes a channel, as it were, no matter how dumb, how poor, how obscure, for the infinite mercy of Allāh.

The example par excellence of this dimension of al-‘Iḥsān is the Prophet Muḥammad ﷺ, of whom Allāh ﷻ said,

﴿وَمَا أَرْسَلْنَاكَ إِلَّا رَحْمَةً لِّلْعَالَمِينَ﴾

WA MĀĀ ‘ARSALĀKA ‘ILLĀ RAḤMATĀL-LIL-‘ĀLAMĪN

We have not sent you save as a Mercy to all the worlds.

(*al-‘Anbiyā’* 21:107)

It is ‘iḥsān that is referred to in three very well known Ḥadīth Qudsī, in which Allah ﷻ says on the tongue of the Prophet ﷺ,

²²Which is to say, the observation or surveillance of the slave by his Lord or of the Lord by His slave is most easily observed in prostration (*sajdah*)

“I treat my worshipper (*‘abd*) as he expects from Me.
 When he remembers Me, I am with him.
 Thus if he remembers Me in his heart
 I remember him in My Heart
 If he remembers me in a gathering
 I remember him at a better gathering
 — the gathering of My angels —
 If my worshipper draws near to Me by the length of a finger,
 I draw near to him by the length of a hand.
 If he draws closer to me by one hand
 I draw closer to him by two hands.
 If he comes to Me walking I come to him running.”

“Who becomes an enemy to one of My friends (*awliyā’*)
 then I have declared war on him
 and if any of My worshippers seeks to come closer to Me
 by voluntary actions (*nafl*) other than by my orders
 then he is more dear to Me.
 My worshipper does not cease to draw near Me
 by free acts of worship (*nafl*) until I love him.
 And when I love him I become the ears by which he hears
 and the sight by which he sees
 and the hands by which he strikes
 and the legs upon which he strides
 and when he asks I will give him
 and when he seeks refuge with Me then I will give him refuge.
 I am never hesitant about any thing
 save when I must take the soul of this faithful slave
 when he has no wish to die for I hate to displease him,”

“My heavens cannot contain Me, nor can my earth,
 Nothing but the heart of My believing slave can contain Me.”

By way of an aside, can anyone who reads such statements coming out of the mouth of Muḥammad Rasuḷullāh ﷺ really doubt that gnosis (*maʿarifah*) is truly at the heart of ʿIslām?

These are not statements made in a later time by some ‘mystic’ or another. Can people really seriously allege that the origin of Ṣūfism is found in Christainity or that somehow Ṣūfism is a counteraction of the Persians against the Arabs or some by-product of neo-Platonic philosophy or an amalgam of the views of Aristotle, Plato and Pythagoras melded into Gnostic Judeo-Christianity thru the offices of Hermes Trismegistus?

What rubbish! As are the even more far fetched assertions that the roots of Ṣūfism somehow lie in Shamanic Buddhism.

Indeed, as we make our way in search of what might be the real goods so far as Ṣūfism is concerned, we will always find ourselves being referred to the Qurʾān and the sayings (ʿahādīth) and actions (*sunnah*) of the Prophet ﷺ.

For instance when in the second Ḥadīth Qudsī on the preceding page the phrase, “voluntary acts of worship” are mentioned we know just what that word *nafl* means.

Nafl, or in the plural, *nāfilah* are those acts whose performance is sanctioned by the Ṣharīʿah in such a manner that the person who does them is rewarded, but the person who omits them occurs no blame. *Nāfilah* are actions that the Prophet ﷺ did but not always or did off and on such as fasting on Mondays and Thursdays and during the White Days of the full moon, or spending (*sadaqah*) on the poor, or praying varying numbers of rakʿat²³ after those which Allāh ﷻ has directly ordered (*farūd*).

When in the first Ḥadīth Qudsī, we read the word *remember* (*dhikr*) over and over again we know not only what that means, but we know the forms of *dhikr* favoured by the Prophet ﷺ especially after ṣalāt, beginning with the recital of the ʿAyāt al-Kursī and the last three suwār of the Qurʾān and the thirty-three sets of Subḥana-llāh, ʿAlḥamdu-li-llāh, Allāhu ʿAkbar.

²³Literally, bendings or bowings, but as a term it means the delineation of cycles of ṣalāh. See our publication, *Taʿlimu-ṣ-Ṣalāh* (Learning the Ṣalāh), 1993, Alexandria, Egypt. Noon Hierographers, Box 8, Keene, VA 22946

And we know he finished these ʿadhkār by saying,

« لا إله إلا الله وحده لا شريك له ،

له الملك و له الحمد و هو على كل شيء قدير »

LĀĀ ʾILĀHA ILLA-LLĀHU WAḤDAHU LĀ ṢḤARIKA LAH •
LAHU-L-MULKU WA LAHU-L-ḤAMDU
WA HUWA ʿALA KULLI ṢḤAYIN QADĪR

There is no deity save Allāh, alone, without a partner.

His is the dominion, His is the praise

&

He has power over all things.

It is these practices (*sunnah*) we find when we look to see both the sources and the means of Ṣūfī practice.

And what we find is not a hidden secret, save that it is hidden in the sense that it is an open secret, such that the majority are either not interested in it or simply don't take the time to understand it and are content to simply fulfill their obligations. Which, by Allāh, is enough even if it is no more than that.

What is more out in the open than the ṣalāt which is performed over and over again and then once again in the endless nāfilah?

﴿ نُورٌ عَلَىٰ نُورٍ ﴾

NŪRUN ʿALĀ NŪR

Light upon light

(*al-Nūr* 24:35)

What is more out in the open than the public invocations of the Prophet ﷺ which he made over and over again over the years?

But it is in these open secrets contained in the ṣhahadah, and in the ṣalāt, and in the zakāt, and in the ṣawm and in the ḥajj that we find the spring (ʿayn) of the ṣūfīs which never runs dry and forever satisfies the thirst and makes tranquil the hearts.

These are the practices that the true grand Ṣhaykh ﷺ himself prescribed, and these are the same practices that more than thirty lifetimes of masters have prescribed as the perfect and efficacious means of arriving to true knowledge of Allāh ﷻ.

These are the real goods that we have referred to, and to which we do refer. Real goods that are freely available to anyone who cares to put them into practice exactly to the degree that they are able, and to the degree that they are guided by Allāh ﷻ.

﴿يَهْدِي اللَّهُ لِنُورِهِ مَن يَشَاءُ﴾

YAHDI-LLĀHU LI-NŪRIHĪ MAÑY-YASHĀĀ°

Allāh guides to His Light whom He chooses.
(*al-Nūr* 24:35)

﴿نَرْفَعُ دَرَجَاتٍ مَّن نَّشَاءُ﴾

NARFA°U DARAJĀTIM-MAN-NASHĀĀ°

We raise in degree whom We choose.
(*al-'An'ām* 6:83)

I have written before of the efficacy of the recitation of the Qur'ān and the practice of the Ṣalāh²⁴ and I do not want to say more about these practices, except to say that those who plunge into these oceans find lights and inspirations that bring them to the most profound and truthful states of being.

How perfect the practice, composed as it is of silence and speech: the bendings, the bowings, the prostration, the sitting. Performed in ten thousand different situations²⁵ thru the days and the nights, and in time subtly sanded down — worn smooth and blessedly, graciously, now and then, transported into other realms alluded to in the °āyat,

﴿سُبْحَنَ الَّذِي أَسْرَىٰ بِعَبْدِهِ لَيْلًا
مِّنَ الْمَسْجِدِ الْحَرَامِ إِلَى الْمَسْجِدِ الْأَقْصَا﴾

SUBĀHĀNA-L-LADHĪ °ASRĀ BI-°ABDIHĪ LAYLAM-MINA-L-
MASJIDI-L-ḤARĀMI °ILA-L-MASJIDI-L-°AQĀṢĀ

*Exalted is He who took His Servant by night from
the Inviolable Place of Worship to the Far Distant Place of Prostration.*
(*al-'Isrā'* 17:1)

²⁴“The Recital of Qur'ān as a Spiritual Practice” (1997) and “Timeless Spirituality: Its Relation to Some Temporal Practices of °Islām” (1997).

²⁵Lest the reader think that I am engaging in hyperbole suffice it to say that if one performs the five farūd every day, over the course of 5½ years one performs in excess of 10,000 ṣalawāt and almost 70,000 prostrations.

And the ṣalāh is only one of the ways of attaining to that state of exaltation which has been attested to over the centuries.

Each of the divinely prescribed practices, and here I am not thinking only of the five that I have mentioned, has depths that will never be plumbed until the end of time.

You can take any one of these practices or, like a hologram, an aspect of one of them and each of them will prove themselves to be the means to the same depths and avenues of light.

I have not, for instance, mentioned purification (*ṭaharah*) or struggle (*jihād*), each of which afford so many opportunities in the work (*ʿamal*) of putting the good and the beautiful (*ḥusn*) into practice in one's daily life which is, after all, what ³Iḥsān is about when it is taken out of the ideal and actuated.

When clearly seen, the ṣharīʿah is, both in the aggregate and in each particular, the perfect and perfected means available to all humans to reach God-consciousness (*taqwā*) and Allāh wariness, and it is this *taqwā* which truly enobles human beings.²⁶

﴿ الْيَوْمَ أَكْمَلْتُ لَكُمْ دِينَكُمْ
وَ أَتَمَمْتُ عَلَيْكُمْ نِعْمَتِي وَ رَضِيتُ لَكُمُ الْإِسْلَامَ دِينًا ﴾

AL-YAWMA ʾAKMALTU LAKUM DĪNAKUM WA ʾATMAMTU
ʿALAYKUM NIʿMATĪ WA RAḌĪTU LAKUM ʾISLĀMA DĪNĀ

This day I have perfected for you your religion and completed My favour upon you and have approved for you ʾIslām as (your) religion.
(*al-Māʾidah* 5:3)

Is there then any difference then between Ṣūfism and ³Islām?

An old friend of mine, Ṣhaykh ʿUmār Abdullāh ۞ from the Islands of the Moon (*Jazīrātu-l-Qamr*), once remarked to me, “If we were better ṣūfis no one would take us for anything other than good Muslims.”

This is a degree of transparency (*ash-shaffafiyah*) beyond the understanding of many modern-day ṣūfis who seem so set on appearing (*dhāhir*) rather than disappearing (*ʾikhtifāʾ*).

²⁶“Indeed the most noble of you in the sight of Allāh is the one who has the most *taqwā*.” 49:13 (*taqwa*, often translated as the fear or wariness of Allāh)

What we can perhaps say is that Ṣūfism is knowledge (‘ilm) of the inner purpose of the prescribed practices and just how these practices can be efficaciously employed by each worshipper to consciously go about transforming the self (*nafs*).

In this sense Ṣūfism is transparent to ʾIslām because it is not so much some ‘thing’ as it is a way of seeing (*mushāhadah*) and insight (*kashf*) into why it is that Allāh ﷻ has ordered us to perform certain acts, as well as a kind of innate knowledge of why the Prophet ﷺ put those orders into practice as he did.

Or perhaps it could be said that this very transformation of the *nafs* is itself what Ṣūfism is; a method, again entirely transparent to ʾIslām, by which one can bring about the conscious transformation of the self through deepening one’s surrender (ʾislām) and, simultaneously, one’s faith (ʾimān) through the practice of those acts and actions ordained by Allāh ﷻ.

Of course we must always emphasize that this *possiblity* comes with the caveat as we have already mentioned,

﴿نَرْفَعُ دَرَجَاتٍ مِّنْ نَّشَاءُ﴾

NARFA^U DARAJĀTIM-MAN-NASHĀ^ʾ

We raise in degree whom We choose.
(al-ʾAnʿām 6:83)

Results are not guaranteed, as the actualization of the potential within each worshipper (ʿabd) is dependent first on Allāh ﷻ and then on the spiritual aspiration (*himmah*) and inner state of pure sincerity (ʾikhhlās) needed to bring about the transformation of the self and the resulting transfigured character (ʾakhlāq) which has always been the true sign of the Ṣūfī.

﴿إِلَّا الَّذِينَ تَابُوا وَاصْلَحُوا وَاعْتَصَمُوا بِاللَّهِ
وَاخْلَصُوا دِينَهُمْ لِلَّهِ فَأُولَٰئِكَ مَعَ الْمُؤْمِنِينَ﴾

ʾILLA-LLADHĪNA TĀBŪ WA ʾAṢLAḤŪ WA-ʿTASAMŪ BI-LLĀHI
WA ʾAKḤLAṢŪ DĪNAHUM LI-LLĀHI
FA-ŪLĀĀʾIKA MAʿA-L-MUʾMINĪN

*Those who return (to Allāh) and correct themselves and hold fast to Allāh
and are sincere in their faith in Allāh — they shall be with the believers.*
(an-Nisāʾ^a 4:146)

As I come to the end of this paper I would like to remind the reader once again of the postulates I mentioned earlier on:

- All ṣūfīs profess to be members of one way (*ṭariqah*) or another.
- All of these ways (*turūq*) trace back to and are ultimately legitimized by Muḥammad ﷺ.
- Muḥammad ﷺ is the Messenger of Allāh ﷻ.
- The Message of Allāh is the Qurʾān, which is the revelation granted to Muḥammad ﷺ by Allāh ﷻ.

Therefore, if you want to understand what Ṣūfism is and what it is not, you must ultimately look to the Qurʾān and the practice (*sunnah*) of the Prophet ﷺ.

What I have tried to do within the time and space limitations imposed on me by the organisers of this symposium is to touch on some of the reasons why there is no Ṣūfism without ʾIslām and also why ʾIslām without Ṣūfism at its heart can appear flat and one-dimensional; a sterile desert of do's and don'ts.

The main thing I have sought to make clear is that if you are looking to learn about or practice Ṣūfism and come across a teaching or a teacher that does not unequivocally direct you to the Qurʾān and the Sunnah, your best bet is to move on as fast as you can so as not to waste your precious time.

There may be some benefits which may be found in such teachings and teachers but they are rather like the benefits of wine and games of chance, of which Allāh ﷻ says,

﴿ يَسْأَلُونَكَ عَنِ الْخَمْرِ وَالْمَيْسِرِ قُلْ فِيهِمَا إِثْمٌ كَبِيرٌ
وَمَنْعٌ لِلنَّاسِ وَإِنَّهُمَا أَكْبَرُ مِنْ نَفْعِهِمَا ﴾

YASʾALŪNAKA ʿANIL-KḤAMRI WA-L-MAYSIR ; QUL
FĪHIMĀĀ ʾITḤMUŪN KABĪRUŪN WA MANĀFIʿU LIN-NĀSI WA
ʾITḤMUHUMĀĀ ʾAKBARU MIN-NAFʾIHIMĀ

They ask you about wine and games of chance. Say, 'In them there is great evil and some benefit for people but their evil is greater than their benefit.'

(al-Baqarah 2:219)

Here are some generally accepted and time tested criteria of the Ṣaykh (or Ṣaykhah). 1) He or she is a Muslim adhering to Qurʾān and Sunnah outwardly and inwardly, in the large and the small — at home and in the world insofar as the means of earning a living, daily activities, surroundings, concentration, company and concerns. 2) He or she has received ^ʿ*idhn* (permission) to teach and initiate others in the form of a written (preferably) and signed *ijāzah* (authorization) from his or her Ṣaykh who is a known ‘link’ in the chain (*silsilah*) of spiritual transmission. 3) The Ṣaykh possesses, and is capable of transmitting through teaching and guidance, the perfected means of attaching the seeker (*murīd*) to the Absolute and the most efficacious methods of concentrating on the Reality.

Ṣaykh Aḥmad az-Zurruq رحمہ اللہ, a well-known Ṣhādhḍhulī, says the implicit conditions of the ṣaykh are: “1) He must have a pure and lucid taste. 2) His outward knowledge must be sound. 3) His aspiration must be strong. 4) His outward state must be pleasing. 5) His insight must be piercing.” He says further that anyone who manifests any of the following qualities is *not* a ṣaykh: “1) Ignorance of the religion (*dīn*). 2) Disregard (or scorn) for the sanctity of other Muslims. 3) Entering into that which is not his concern. 4) Following his own desires. 5) Lack of shame in regard to bad manners or bad character.”

In his book on the Principles of Ṣūfism (*qawāʿid at-taṣawwuf*) Ṣaykh az-Zarrūq also says that “The ṣūfī’s views of dealing with Allāh are more scrupulous (*wariʿ*) than the jurist (*faqih*) for the faqih considers that which makes difficulties disappear while the ṣūfī considers that which brings about perfection. The views of the ṣūfī are also more exacting than that of the theologian (*ʿalim*) because the ʿalim examines the orthodoxy of belief while the Ṣūfī seeks that which straightens certitude (*al-yaqīn*). His view is also more particular than a Qurʾānic commentator (*mufasssir*) and the traditionalist (*muḥaddith*) for the mufasssir and the muḥaddith examine the rule and the idea whilst the ṣūfī goes beyond that to seek the inner meaning after ascertaining what the mufasssir and the muḥaddith established. If he does not do such, then he is simply an esoterist (*bāṭinī*) who has departed from Divine Law (*aṣḥ-ṣḥarīʿah*).”

Assuming one has the the real goods and a real teacher, what can one hope to realise within the practice of ʿIslām from the ṣūfī perspective?

Realisation in the temporal realm is referenced in the ḥadīth in which the Prophet ﷺ, speaking of the benefits of the ṣalāh, says, “If a man had a stream flowing outside of his house and bathed in it five times daily would he not be cleansed?”

﴿ أَلَا بِذِكْرِ اللَّهِ تَطْمَئِنُّ الْقُلُوبُ ﴾

ʾALĀ BI-DḥIKRI-LLAHI TATĀMAʾINNU-L-QULŪB

Surely the remembrance of Allāh brings peace to the heart.
(ar-Raʿad 13:28)

But deep within the temporal realm there is a door that leads to an eternal world of gardens through which rivers flow and beyond that to a world of pure light and endless mercy (*rahmah*). This is the world of those brought close to Allāh ﷻ (*al-muqarabūn*); the world of those who have arrived (*tawaṣṣul*).

As we have come to know, ʿIḥsān is to worship Allāh as tho you saw Him, mindful if you do not see Him, He sees you.

Arrival (*wuṣul*) is to worship without an ‘if’. That is to worship Allāh ﷻ thru His disclosing of Himself to His slave.

There are of course those who say that such is not possible since the contingent can never even imagine the Absolute, let alone see It. There are others that say that even if such a thing were possible it would only be in the Final World (*al-ʾākhirah*) and certainly is impossible in this world (*ad-dunyā*).

To the latter we say, consider this ʾāyat.

﴿ يَأْتِيهَا النَّفْسُ الْمُطْمَئِنَّةُ . أَرْجِعِي إِلَىٰ رَبِّكَ رَاضِيَةً
مَّرْضِيَةً . فَأَدْخُلِي فِي عِبْدِي . وَادْخُلِي جَنَّتِي ﴾

YĀĀʾAYYATUHĀ-N-NAFSU-L-MUTMAʾINNAH • IRJPĪ ʾILĀ
RABBIKI RĀḌIYATAM MARDIYYAH • FADĀ KhULĪ FĪ ʾIBĀDĪ •
WA-DĀ-KhULĪ JANNATĪ

*O self at peace. Return unto your Lord. Well pleased, well pleasing.
Enter among My slaves. Enter My Garden.*”
(al-Fajr 89:27-30)

To the former we would remind them, and at the same time remind ourselves once again, of the event that occurred before time was, when Allāh gathered together all the souls that would ever come to be and asked in their collectivity and singularity,

﴿ أَلَسْتُ بِرَبِّكُمْ ﴾
 قَالُوا بَلَىٰ شَهِدْنَا ۚ أَن تَقُولُوا يَوْمَ الْقِيَمَةِ
 إِنَّا كُنَّا عَنْ هَٰذَا غَافِلِينَ ﴿

‘ALASTU BI-RABBIKUM : QĀLŪ BALĀ SHĀHIDNĀĀ
 ‘AN TAQŪLŪ YŌWMA-L-QIYĀMATI
 ‘INNĀ KUNNĀ ‘AN HĀDHĀ GHĀFILĪN

*“Am I not your Lord ?” They said, “Yes! of a certainty.”
 (This) lest you should say on the Day of Resurrection,
 “As for us we were not aware.”
 (al-‘A‘rāf 7:172)*

If in our pre-eternal celestial beginnings we all saw the Truth, it certainly remains, at the very least, within the realm of hope that our beginnings may be remembered in our present and that we may see what we saw before time was.

So...

﴿ فَاذْكُرُونِي ۖ أَذْكُرْكُمْ ﴾
 FADĤKRŪNĪ ‘ADĤKURKUM
 Remember Me and I will remember you
 (al-Baqarah 72:152)

وَاللَّهُ أَعْلَمُ
 [and Allāh knows best]
 al-Hajj ‘Abdullāh Nooruddeen Durkee
 who is poor before his Lord and enriched from His Bounty
 14 Dhū-l-Qa‘dah 1418 Hijri — Full Moon — 13 March 1998 Miladi
 Green Mountain near Red Hill
 Virginia

